1: Hoebel E-5 (1933) 1940 NO6 Comanche NO6

Though the horse was not a primary source of food, stories and case histories reveal that horse meat was eaten on occasion and relished. In food-getting Comanche culture was basically a buffalo culture. [262]

As a beast of burden and as a means of personal transportation the horse had a fundamental value to the Comanche. In this respect the horse was a [492] capital good. But the single individual could not effectively utilize more than a dozen horses in his personal string for use in war and hunting.

Beyond this, horses were exceedingly acceptable as gifts and tokens of 431 esteem. As gifts given in reciprocity for services rendered and as fees to 422 medicine men, they served as an informal medium of exchange. As objects demandable in settlement of damage suits at law, they were a tangible form of material wealth endowed with legal and monetary significance.

In spite of all this, the great value of horses to the Comanche was a [554] fiduciary value of inflated worth as prestige tokens, a value rooted in socio-psychological rather than economic factors.

Though captured Mexican youths and children purchased from poverty- 233 stricken Shoshone Indians served as herdsmen, and the increase of herds 556 through selective breeding was practiced by the Comanches, the basic fac- [567] tor in the acquisition and retaining of a large herd was the military skill of the owners. Thus it is that the possession of horses figured in the prestige competition which so constantly and vigorously activated the life of the Comanche male.

The size of Comanche herds was immense. Probably no Indians were more richly supplied than they. Upon the count of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the Antelope band alone surrendered one thousand five hundred horses to the United States at the time of the capitulation at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, on June 2, 1875.[17] A single Comanche, Big Fall By Tripping, is reputed among the Indians to have owned more than a thousand horses at one time.

The great communal hunts of the buffalo occurred during the summer 224 months after the seasonal moulting was done and hides were in their prime. This was the season for the in-gathering of the bands. Sporadic and uncontrolled hunting of buffalo occurred whenever they were available during other seasons.

The time of the hunt was determined in democratic assembly at which everybody was welcome to listen, but in which the war leaders took the important part. The date for departure being set, the young and able-bodied men with their women left the main camp. Children and old persons remained behind. The expedition travelled light, taking very small and undecorated tipis and what weapons and tools were necessary.

[17] Commissioner of Indian Affairs (Annual Report, Washington, 1875), p. 273.

3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
NO6 Comanche NO6

Government and Law

Among settled peoples with fixed property and diversified economics, the institution of land tenure, the disposition and inheritance of property, the treatment of chattels, and the obligations of contract form the most important aspects of civil law. Yet among the Comanches these had almost no significance. The Comanches had no concept of land value. As herding hunters, land was a matter of unconcern for them, being held neither individually, jointly, nor communally. One may speak of their country as being merely communally occupied. There are no records of any disputes between the bands over hunting grounds. The external boundaries of the Comanchería were not firmly fixed, but vaguely felt. Allies and friends were welcome to hunt and visit, but other outsiders entered on peril of their lives.

Wealth for the Comanches centered largely in horses, as has already been shown; horses were individually owned by both men and women. They were acceptable as a medium of exchange and could be used as payment of obligations in damage suits. Women, too, might be listed in the category of chattel property—first of father and brother and later of husband. Dogs must also be included under the heading of private property. They abounded, but after the acquisition of the horse had little economic value or importance save as camp scavengers and sentries. The idea of liability for the acts of animals did not exist. There was no recompense for a dog bite; nor could damages be collected for injuries received from a kicking horse.

The Comanches owned a number of captives who were chattel property until adopted as brothers by their owners if they were boys or married by their captors if they were girls. There were a few personal slaves held by blood covenant by individual warriors. They were generally captives, Mexicans forming the bulk of the number. A blood ceremony, according to Josiah Gregg, was performed with blood taken from a vein on the back of the captive's hand or arm. The ceremony was repeated whenever ownership of the slave changed. The slave had the right of life, food, and protection, since no one dared molest the property of another, and the owner could sell or transfer him at any time to whomever he chose.[25] There are indications that the Comanches captured and sold slaves merely as articles

[25] Gregg, *op. cit.*, 434.

The Comanches

567 [422] of trade, and poverty-stricken Shoshones often sold their children to their more prosperous Comanche cognates.

641 [727] Some captives became naturalized, free members of the tribe, even respected warriors. The changed status was recognized by a solemn ceremony only after the Comanches felt they ran no risk by such a step. According to the customary procedure, the pipe was passed around the council circle. After smoking, all stood up, each placing his right hand over the heart, then raising it toward the sun, repeating the process while marching around the circle. Then the captive was led before the chief to take the oath, wherein he promised faithfully to perform all the duties of a Comanche warrior, to help provide for, protect, and obey the chief in all things in both peace and war. The person taking the oath was then given a Comanche name and was required to select a family and be adopted by a brother.

422 424 Objects of material culture were personally owned, but the test of ownership was not production so much as use. Clothing was made, for example, by the women, but was owned by the person who wore it. The medicine formula was privately owned, but could be transferred. War honors were a sort of property which might on occasion be transferred, but rather as a mark of esteem and not for economic consideration. Objects jointly used, like the tipi, were usually considered to be the property of the husband.

428 At the time the Comanches were confined upon the reservation, their practices in regard to inheritance were in a chaotic condition. Apparently the whole problem of inheritance was so new to their culture that no established norms had evolved. The Plateau tribes from whom the Comanches had separated themselves when they entered the plains were accustomed to destroy all a man's property at his death. This included clothing, weapons, saddles, tools, war paraphernalia, and horses customarily ridden by the deceased, and in ancient times even the wife. In the early days, the Comanches also sometimes killed the favorite wives of a deceased warrior. Articles of intimate personal use were buried with the corpse; other less important articles were burned. This destruction entailed few hardships and no serious economic loss, since the property was limited to clothing and a few weapons and utensils. When the Comanches acquired horses, inheritance became a serious problem. To slaughter the entire

21: Burnet T-5 (1818-1819) 1951 NO6 Comanche
Texas

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727 [ca. 1818]

complicated suffering. The well known shout "come to the dance," resounds through the camp, and the welkin rings with the screams and yells of infuriate females, trooping impetuous to the scene of torment. The wretched captive, bearing a staff on which are pendent, the scalps of his friends and companions, it may be, of his father and brethren who were slain in the fury of the recent combat, is hurried to the appointed spot, where the frantic crowd assemble around him, impatient to begin their orgies. Faint with fear and trembling, he is hurled to the centre, while the shouting throng gather around in tumultuous circles, and assail him with clubs, and thongs, and knives, and javelins, and firebrands, in unmeasured and reckless fury, compelling him the while, to unite his voice with the hellish choir, to dance and sing, and wave the standard, reeking with the gory scalps of his kindred, until he sinks to the ground, borne down with fatigue and excess of torment. He is then again staked-out on the earth, to await the diversions of the morrow, and the morrow—when similar scenes are re-acted upon him. If haply, he survives this severe initiation, he is afterwards exempt from corporal punishment, is considered a member, *sub conditionis*, of their society, and is attached as a slave to the family of the warrior who captured him, where he is generally treated with humanity. The men object to the abolition of this dreadful custom of surrendering their prisoners, on account of its antiquity, and the gratification it affords the squaws; but they will sometimes interfere to repress excessive barbarities.

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When they capture boys and girls, as they often do in their excursions to the Spanish provinces, they usually treat them with much lenity and kindness, and retain them in a kind of filial servitude, very little inferior to the condition of native children. It is singular with what facility these ill-fated youths will assimilate themselves to the habits of their new associates. Spanish boys from 10 to 15 years old will become so reconciled to their captivity in a few weeks after their introduction to this wild and uncultured society, as to be distinguishable only by the slight variations of nature, from their savage companions, and will generally out-

24: Richardson H-4 (no date) 1929 NO6 Comanche NO6
(1854-1859) Texas

164 The health of the Indians was not always good. Veneral
657 diseases were virulent and common and there was not sufficient medicines and doctors. Typhoid pneumonia is mentioned among the diseases reported by the doctor who occasionally attended the patients.[20]

241 The reservation farmer had his troubles also. The Indians would turn their horses into the corn field, or turn them loose where it was evident that they would get in the field. They would pull melons no larger than an egg and were want to consume all
241 their corn before it had grown to good roasting-ears. In the spring
657 of the second year they refused for some time to plant their crops until they had been given presents, but finally the agent persuaded them to go to work without the presents.

578 Sometimes there was violence unto death. A chief engaged
684 in intrigue with another man's wife and, according to custom, the injured man demanded that the chief compensate him to the amount of a horse. When the chief refused or hesitated to do this he was
696 slain at once by the sons of the injured man. Then the father and his sons together with their women and children fled from the reservation and were not overtaken, although a scouting party followed them for a hundred and fifty miles.[21]

177 And yet, notwithstanding these evidences of savage crudeness, it must be said that at least some of the Indians were making
177 progress toward a more civilized existence. Under the direction
241 of the reservation farmer they worked and occasionally made fairly
657 good crops, but the amount of land in cultivation was small. In 1857, they made but fifty bushels of wheat off of the twenty acres sown and 500 bushels of corn was produced on the remainder of
[567] their land in cultivation. For awhile the Indians were prone to rely too much on their prisoners to do the work but after these were freed and returned to their people in Mexico that abuse was corrected. In 1858, the reserve farmer reported a better yield. In the spring of that year he had divided the community fields into six divisions in order that each of the prominent clans might have
[23] a parcel of ground suited to its numbers. He thought that they would have made enough grain (principally corn) that year to

[113] 20. J. Shirley, bill for medical services, March 29, 1858. Ms. University of Texas photostat copy. Neighbors to Manypenny, March 7, 1856. Ibid.
[113] 21. Leeper to Neighbors, April 9, 1858, Ibid.

32: Gilles O,X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
NO6 Comanche NO6
Oklahoma

camp functioning properly. The tasks were varied and time-consuming, and no one woman could have taken care of all of them.

The warrior-husband was the killer of game, the procurer of buffalo meat, the Comanches' principal source of food. He had to have two sets of trained horses—one trained for war, the other for the killing of buffalo. In either pursuit, his life was largely dependent on the horse. He manufactured both his riding gear and his weapons, and he trained his own horses. His fighting was practically on a twelve-month basis, since, though the Comanches did not like winter fighting, most of the ambitious warriors made raiding expeditions into Old Mexico when the group went into winter camp.

The husband, therefore, could be of little or no help around the camp, and the labor had to be divided among the women. Usually one of the women was an expert horsewoman and had the responsibility of her husband's horse herd, which often numbered a hundred or more. When the fall hunt was on for the winter's supply of meat, the wives did the skinning and butchering. They dried the meat and made the pemmican. Also, they prepared and tanned the hides. After the tanning came the making of clothing. This included everything the family wore, both in summer and winter. Since there was neither needle nor thread, the holes in the leather were made with a stone awl or one made from bone, and sinew taken from along the backbone of a buffalo or deer was used for thread.

Other hides were converted into robes for bedding or into covers for the tepees. When camp was moved, tepees had to be taken down and fastened on travoises, like all the other camp gear, and then camp must be set up again at the new location. All of this was strictly woman's work.

Somewhere, sometime, during breathing spells from all these duties, the women bore babies, nursed them, and raised them to be good Comanches. And all this was in a society without a recognized medium of exchange, in which no one could hire anything done. The Comanches did, however, utilize slave labor. Successful warriors furnished captive women to their wives for helpers. These captive women were given the opportunity to trade their slave status for wifehood, and captive girls were carefully trained to become Comanche wives. Captive boys were trained as warriors to fill the vacancies in the warrior ranks. In addition to members of other tribes, Anglos, Spaniards, and Mexicans were abducted to be made slaves.

32: Gilles O;X-3 (1902-c.1910) 1974
NO6 Comanche NO6
Oklahoma

In Comanche society, once a woman left her father's camp she must of necessity become a wife. There was not another nook or cranny of Comanche society into which she could crowd herself. There were no avocations open to her. Prostitution and concubinage were not countenanced, and the enslavement of an unattached Comanche woman by another Comanche was completely unthinkable. (An example of the length to which a Comanche's obligation to respect the rights of other Comanches extended may be seen in the situation of the semiwild dogs that infested every camp. These dogs were not pets—they were parasites. But they could be neither killed nor mistreated. They were relatives of the coyote; and since the coyote was a relative of the Comanche, one had as well abuse another Comanche as one of these semiwild dogs.)

Provision for widows was made in this manner: if a man was killed, or if he died from disease, his wives became the wives of his brother or brothers, and his children became the children of his brother or brothers. There was also a relationship known as blood brotherhood, in which two men mingled their blood together. Such a blood brother could succeed as the husband of his deceased blood brother's wives.

During the more than five years when I was among the Comanches and was dealing with them, I became sold on polygamy as a way of life for them. They made it work. After twenty-six years of peace, there continued to be a much larger number of women than men. Though all but three of the old warrior group that I knew had more than one wife, and a number had three or more, I knew of no single man in that age group. Neither were there surplus unattached women. And women must have outnumbered men in the age group of forty-five years and over, by considerably more than two to one.

As nearly as I was able to discover, the multiple wife situation was a development rather than the result of a plan. A man did not decide he was going to have two, three, or more wives and go out and purchase the number he had decided upon. He started modestly, as a young warrior, with the purchase of one wife. Then as he prospered, gained a reputation, and accumulated a horse herd and maybe a baby or two, the work would become too heavy for one wife. Obviously they couldn't secure a hired girl, so they looked around and probably decided between them who would make a satisfactory and agreeable number two wife. When possible, a younger sister of the number